TWO FAT ACTORS RETURN TO BROADWAY

BY FRANKLYN FYLES

NEW YORK, Dec. 2.—Two actors older and fatter than they used to be, Nat Goodwin and McKee Rankin, reintroduced themselves in Broadway this week. Twenty-five years ago, Goodwin was the very best of the singing and dancing mimics. He began in vaudeville as an imitator of famous actors, went therefrom into inimitable clowning in burlesque, passed up thence with easy facility to comedy without antics, and even reached the height of Shakespeare, although he could not hold it. Now he is engaged again in the congenial personation of an American in England—by far the most satisfactory things to the public, if not to himself, that he can do with his drollery. Of course he would tickle us more if he were to break out once in a while in a song or dance; but, at his years and dignity, we can't ask him to do that. No doubt he would in his artistic ambition, like to get rid of his unpolished individuality, but no one else wants him to. That is all that makes the hero of "The Usurper" acceptable while the play is rejected.

McKee Rankin was in his heyday the handsomest actor on the American stage. That was a third of a century ago. He had been a lieutenant in the British army, stationed in Canada during his brief service, and he resigned to go on the stage with Shakespearean and other fond aspirations; but he put them aside to make money—a great deal of it—with Joaquin Miller's melodrama of the Rockies, "The Danites." That fortune oozed away, and since then he has done all sorts of things with his talent. I dropped into a Denver theatre, a dozen years ago, and found him playing Sir Anthony in "The Rivals," with his daughter Gladys as Lydia, her husband Sydney Drew as Bob Acres, Sydney's mother, Mrs. John Drew, as Mrs. Malaprop, Mrs. Drew's granddaughter Ethel Barrymore as Sophia, and her grandson Lionel Barrymore as Captain Ansolute. Wasn't that a family party; also a training school? Later, Rankin led a cut-rate stock company to ruin in this city, but from the debris saved Nance O'Neil. It is with her this week in "Fires of St. John" that the matinee idol of other days is on view.

Rankin is not merely fat, but grotesquely huge. He plays an obdurate father, yet smug and genial, without any agonies, and so the pitfalls of ridicule were not in the road for him to fall into. His acting is in the old manner of making "points," and insisting on discovering in each sentence a keynote of farce, melodrama or something else clearly defined, but never realizing the variety consistent with every speech. His ambling pursuit of forgotten words, and his substitution of whatever comes into his mind, may be an infirmity of memory instead of carelessness; yet business is business, even in amusements, and when you pay the price to hear a play you are entitled to every line of it.

Although a thorough knowledge of modern literature demands a familiarity with Sudermann in all his phases, you need not regard a brief account of "Fires of St. John" as an insult to your intelligence. The day before St. John's Night is two days before a wedding in a rural Prussian family. An ingenuous, peculant, silly girl is to be bound to her cousin, a free-thinking, anarchistic fellow who chafes under the despotism of the German home—a theme that Sudermann harps upon. In the household is a "calamity child," a Gypsy who has been brought up by the bride's father as his own offspring. The warring natures of these persons, amplified by minor types, brings about the catastrophe unaided by external occurrence. The problem of independent ideals bowed by domestic conventionality is similar to "Magda," but the instances and the climax are alike that in moral effect only. The foster daughter loves the congenially anarchistic cousin, but is held to silence by respect for her one reverential feeling—for her wandering mother. The old hag, drunk and pleading to her daughter for money to buy more drink, lies and steals, and the girl's last rock of hope crumbles under her feet.

It is St. John's night, the wedding eve, when the fires on the hill light the dark sky and symbolize lawless love, as their dead embers foretoken the black wastes of the afterwards. All have retired save the two wild spirits, who are one in revolt and in passion. Across a table, in a room unlighted, but for a single candle shining on their faces, this man and this woman discuss their duty to their home, to the old father and to the bride of the morrow. They see it clearly that life means to them bitterness, sacrifice, the death of ideals. But on St. John's night, in the glow of the fires on the hill, the primeval nature of the lovers is dominant. They are each other's then, at least. The last act is the marriage morn, and amidst the detail of preparation and departure for the church the shining two discuss what to do. The idea of their own union is dismissed as ignoble, because it would entail the wreckage of their mutual home, and so is the easy refuge of suicide. The debt to duty is realized and faced. The man goes to the church to be wedded to an unloved wife, and the woman he loves remains behind with her hopeless love of him.

Nat Goodwin has not yet taken on so many years and pounds that they disqualify him for one of those audacious Americans whose hard business cheek can blush softly with love. This time he places the familiar fellow in a play that fails so surely with Broadway audiences, anyway, that a less agreeable actor would have to discard it at once. But, while "The Usurper" as a whole is rejected, Goodwin as its hero is accepted. It is fair to assume that the play as I. N. Morris wrote it was a melodrama outright and unequivocal, for Mr. Morris' compositions have been in that line, and that Goodwin—seeing a role for himself in the former cowboy, now a Croesus, who crosses the Atlantic in quest of the girl tourist whom he fell in love with ten years ago—had it adapted with comedy intent. If an original, resourceful American humorist had done the rewriting thoroughly the result would be, I am sure, a very valuable play for Goodwin. The enriched cow-puncher leases the country home of an impoverished old English family, and insists that the widow and her niece shall remain as his guests, his purpose being to get at the niece for courtship. Preposterous? Of course. But you know what a knack Goodwin has at making absurdities seem plausible. The girl of his choice—or it is better to call her a woman, as, with a shrewd avoidance of matching the middle-age actor with an actress under the legal age of consent, full maturity is given to the heroine in the performance as well as in the manuscript—is betrothed already to a nobleman who is white outside and black inside, and the job undertaken by the American is to turn this bad Briton inside out, so that his fiancee may see his contents. That he does it is a matter of no doubt from the start.

It is easy to say that Goodwin, with his money and experience, need never put himself in any play that isn't pretty nearly what he wants. But the truth is different. To begin with, the character for him can be nothing but a type of American which foreign authors can't create. That restricts him to native dramatists, and the best of them—those whose output finds a ready sale—know him to be hard to please, and prone to do whimsical things with even satisfactory pieces. Augustus Thomas fell out with him over "In Missouri." So did Clyde Fitch over "The Cowboy and the Lady." However, all you who have Goodwin plots in your heads, he is a mark worth while for you to aim at.

New plays come and go at the low-price theatres without getting the attention which, for one reason or another, they sometimes deserve. I went to the northeast corner of the city to see "Flo Flo," and found it interesting because it was midway in grade between the musical comedies of the best houses and the vaudeville burlesques of the worst houses, with distinct characteristics of both, yet lacking the positive qualities of either. Like the two-dollar shows of Broadway, it had rows of girls singing choruses, dancing pantomimically, wearing changes of fanciful costumes and peopling picturesque scenes. Like the half-dollar shows of the Bowery, it had an Irishman, a Hebrew, an Englishman, a Yankee and a negro, the only absentee from the familiar set of caricatures being the German.

The connecting link between Bowery and Broadway in "Flo Flo" was Stella Mayhew, a May Irwin for coon singing and a Fay Templeton for mimicry, as fat as either and as fine as neither, but doing their kinds of work in roughly effectual ways. Miss Mayhew thus stood for broadly wholesome humor on the one hand and for the portly leader of such female companies as the "Midnight Maids" and the "Morning Glory Widows" on the other. But there was no indecent dregs at the bottom of the concoction, any more than there was delicate froth at the top; and, worse still, the ingredients between were not of any particular flavor; so the respectable but not fashionable audience wouldn't swallow it, and Miss Mayhew will try something else.

The most ingenious of Miss Mayhew's new jokes were played with the spot light, which, aimed from the gallery with the accuracy of a sharpshooter, hit her face during the most active of her gambols as surely as when she stood still. But when she sang a ballad that had a range of two octaves, the bright spot went up above her head with the high notes and down below her feet for the low ones. Again, when she whistled to an imaginary dog and called him "Spot," the light danced around her in responsive capers. And finally, when she aimed a goo-goo song at a man in an upper box, the illumination went from her to him and disclosed a bald old fellow in a state of intense admiration. Of course, the butt of the joke had been placed there for the purpose; yet I grinned at it. But most of the audience saw more fun in some of the old things that are never, never omitted from a show of the Naughty Nightingales or the Cuckoo Coquettes—such, for instance, as one fellow telling a story to another with a slap in the face at the point of humor; that other fellow getting even by repeating the process on a third, with a knock-down blow at the climax; and then the fourth fellow, in a similar attempt, getting keeled heels over head himself instead of his intended victim. A congenial audience will no more fail to laugh at that familiar trick than a Shakespearean audience will dare withhold applause from even the worst possible delivery of Mercutio's Queen Mab speech or Jacques' on the seven ages.

Israel Zangwill, author of good books that make poor plays, asserted for publication that the vaudeville stage is better than the legitimate stage for experiments in literary drama. Zangwill strikingly resembles the late Benjamin D'Israeli as to the outside of his head, especially the face at the front, and he seems to know that there is a similarity as to the intellectual contents. Anyway, he is a champion of uncommercial art. So I won't think that he, when he made the remark, was influenced by the fact that he was in a vaudeville theatre where a play of his own was about to be acted. Nor will I suggest that the title, "Six Persons," was not quite square in a business way because it promised six characters when there were only two. What is the use of being querulous? even though Zangwill's play was billed as a "satirical comedietta." It was quite as literary as anything he has ever written; and it was based on our own Autocrat of the Breakfact Table's epigram: "In every conversation between two persons six persons are engaged—as each is, as each thinks he is and as each thinks the other thinks he is."

Zangwill writes out that idea to the length of twenty minutes of dialogue between a Charles and an Eugenia who are lovingly betrothed, yes mutually desireus of breaking the engagement because each has meant to marry money. Charles has a soliloquy in which he is "as he is," followed by a talk with Eugenia in which he is "as he thinks he is," and by another in which he is "as he thinks she thinks he is." Simultaneously, Eugenia passes through the same mental process. The upshot is a sentimental reunion. The writing would be pleasant reading, but it yields little diversion as spoken even by so clever a couple as Isabel Irving and Wilfred North. It is without movement, and the end in plain sight at the beginning. This as a dialogue, not a play, and people don't care a rap if Israel Zangwill did write it—they don't want it and wouldn't accept it from Shapespeare. But Zangwill hasn't changed his mind about the value of his play, although thinks differently as to the vaudeville stage being the right place to offer it. He has taken "Six Persons" to a dramatic theatre, where it is used as a preface to "The Climbers" before fashionable audiences with no better result.

The Progressive Stage Society has undertaken to uplift, not audiences, but the drama. It put its jackscrews under the stage last Sunday afternoon, and gave a turn of the lever with "The Miner and the Soldier." Tola Dorian, the writer of this elevating piece, was as tumultuous as Zangwill was motionless. Her play reddened a half hour with gore enough for a three-hour melodrama. The problem of capital and labor was discussed awhile in a lodge of striking Swedes and a member was sent out to assassinate their hateful boss. The agent went on his errand with a dark lantern in one hand and a long knife in the other. It happened that the soldier on guard was the assassin's son. That made the father feel like throwing up the job, but he decided, after a mental struggle, that it was his higher than parental duty to put the soldier out of the way. The son was a stickler for duty, too, and he had a bayonet on his gun. So it was father against son, knife against bayonet, till both lay dead in the moonlight with the wife and mother kneeling over the corpses. The problem of capital and labor was left unsolved, and the stage remained at an unchanged level.

AN EASY SIX COURSE DINNER.

By Cornelia C. Bedford.

THE menu for this dinner is so planned as to make it feasible for use in almost any section of the United States. By doing some of the preparatory work on the preceding day a hostess who has no maid, or only an incompetent one, need not absent herself for any length of time from her dinner guests; if meat and salad, desert and coffee are served together, it can be reduced to four courses; the fish course can be omitted without detracting from the general effect.

Split Pea Soup with Croutons
Fried Fish Sauce Tartare
Steamed Fish and Rice Oyster Sauce
Creamed Onions.
Lettuce French Dressing
Wafers Cheese
Bavarian Cream in Boxes.
Coffee

As this dinner is planned for five or six persons, one good sized fowl and about two pounds and a half of fish will be sufficient. Any kind of fresh or salt water fish which can be sliced or filleted may be used; if small, it should not be bony.

Pick over, wash and soak a pint of split peas. Next day drain them, cover with three quarts of fresh, cold water, and simmer slowly for four hours; a ham or beef bone, if on hand, will add flavor, and when half done a small carrot, thinly sliced, and half an onion, cut fine, should be added. Press through a sieve, season with salt, pepper and a pinch of thyme, and return to the fire. When boiling stir in a tablespoonful of flour rubbed to a paste with cold water. Boil for five minutes longer. It can then be set aside to reheat at dinner time. Cut four slices of stale bread, freed from crust, in small dice. Spread on a pan and place in a moderate oven until pale brown. Before dinner they can be slightly heated on the warming shelf.

The fowl is to be singed and cleaned as for roasting. Remove the tip joint of each wing and the neck; add heart and liver, cover with a pint of cold water and simmer for an hour or more; this gives a broth for the sauce. Wash and boil a scant cupful of rice in four quarts of slightly salted water; keep at a galloping boil; it will be tender in from twelve to fifteen minutes. Drain it, add a tablespoonful of butter cut in bits, salt and pepper to taste. Stuff the fowl with this, but do not pack it in the cavity. Truss or tie as for roasting. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, roll in cheese cloth and steam until tender. The advantage in this method of cooking is that a very tough, old fowl may be made perfectly tender by prolonging the cooking; two hours will be sufficent for the year old fowl, but three, or even four hours may be given when very tough. Three-quarters or all of the cooking may be done the day before if desired; then all that is necessary is to replace in the steamer until thoroughly hot to the center, which will take about half an hour.

Small white onions make the best appearance at table. Peel them, parboil for ten minutes, drain, add fresh, boiling water and a half teaspoonful of salt, and gently simmer until tender. Use an agate or earthen saucepan, as metal will make them look black and unattractive. Prepare a cream sauce, using equal parts of rich milk and the water in which they are cooked, with one tablespoonful each of butter and flour for each half pint of liquid.

For dessert beat the yolks of two eggs until thick, adding gradually a cupful of fine granulated sugar; beat until the sugar seems dissolved. Add alternately, a little at a time, four tablespoonfuls of cold water and one cupful of flour which has been mixed with one teaspoonful of baking powder and a pinch of salt and sifted twice. Flavor with the grated rind of a lemon and a teaspoonful of the juice; lastly fold in the beaten whites of the eggs. Line a shallow pan with buttered paper, pour in the batter, and bake in a moderate oven. When cold, strip off the paper and cut the cake in squares; split each piece and cut the top half in four strips. Fasten these to the sides of the bottom piece with sugar boiled to the soft ball degree. Soak a quarter of a package of gelatine in three tablespoonfuls of cold water; stand over hot water until dissolved. Add it, with three tablespoonfuls of powderd sugar, one tablespoonful of sherry and a half teaspoonful of vanilla, to three-quarters of a pint of cream. When the mixture shows signs of thickening, beat slowly and steadily to a stiff froth, and heap it in the boxes, garnishing each with a candied cherry.

All of the foregoing, with the exception of the cream filling, may be prepared the day before if guests are to be entertained. A boiled dressing or mayonnaise may also be made (as directed a few weeks ago). Early in the day make the cream and fill the cake boxes, putting them where they will be thoroughly chilled. Pound together to a paste a tablespoonful of chopped parsley, cucumber pickle and capers; drain or press out the watery portion, mix the pulp with the salad dressing, turn into a pretty bowl and set on ice. Boil and mash the potatoes, add seasoning and a little milk, put in a pastry bag, press out in roses on a greased pan and set aside. Pick over and wash a dozen oysters, chop fine and drain. Scald and skim the oyster liquor, add it to the strained chicken stock—from which all fat has been removed—and thicken, using two tablespoonfuls each of butter and flour to a pint of the mixture; season to taste. The oysters are not added until about two minutes before the sauce is dished.

Having a pint or more of fine, dry bread crumbs in readiness, break an egg in a saucer, add a spoonful of warm water, and beat enough to break the stringiness. The fish—either filleted or sliced—is cut in pieces about four inches square. Each piece is seasoned, dipped in the egg and rolled in the crumbs. Lay side by side on a dish dusted with crumbs. The little egg which remains is gently dabbled over the top of the potatoes.

The lettuce, which has been washed and dried, is arranged on plates; the dressing—a simple French one or some Mayonnaise thinned with lemon juice or vinegar—goes in a tiny bowl. A deep kettle of fat is heated to the smoking point. Fifteen minutes is sufficient to heat and brown the potatoes. Three or four minutes in the hot fat will cook the fish, unless it is more than an inch thick. The coffee should be filtered and very strong.

Too Much Work to Do.

(Tit-Bits.)

Village Postmaster—We ought to have another clerk here.

Inspector—More than she can do, eh?

Village Postmaster—Yes; why, sometimes she don't get through reading all the post cards before 10 o'clock at night.

Turn About.

(Detroit Free Press.)

Van X.—My wife has taken a fancy of overrunning her allowance and having the bills sent to my office. I wish I knew how to break her of it.

De Q.—Do as I did: buy a lot of things for yourself and have them sent C. O. D. when she's at home and you're out. By the time she's paid the bills a few times she'll be willing to slap and call it even.